

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8309

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NI, US

SUBJECT: GOWON VISIT AND USG-FMG RELATIONS

REF: LAGOS 8304

SUMMARY: GENERAL GOWON APPEARS RELAXED ABOUT FAILURE MEET PRESIDENT, THOUGH HE IS PIQUED THAT OTHERS, PRIMARILY MOBUTU, SUCCEEDED WHERE THE OAU CHAIRMAN FAILED. SUSPICIOUS HAWKS IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT MAKING CAPITAL. ESSENTIAL INTERESTS REMAIN INTACT, BUT NATIONALISM AND XENOPHOBIA ACCENTUATED AT OUR EXPENSE.

1. ON OCTOBER 13 DURING CALL ON GENERAL GOWON TO DISCUSS ME CRISIS (LAGOS 8306), I TOOK ADVANTAGE OPPORTUNITY GAIN HIS REACTIONS TO NEW YORK TRIP. I REGRETTED THAT LOCAL NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS OF HIS FAILURE SEE PRESIDENT WERE SO INCENDIARY AND UNJUSTLY INFERENTIAL, BUT I WAS GLAD THAT HE AND I KNEW THE PRECISE DIFFICULTIES IN ARRANGING A MEETING.

2. THE GENERAL THOUGHT THAT I SHOULD NOT BE TOO CONCERNED ABOUT NIGERIAN PRESS STORIES, FOR HE IS NOT. HOWEVER, HE NOTED THAT NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS WERE EXTENSIVELY QUOTING FROM AMERICAN OBSERVATIONS, WHICH HE HAD TO ASSUME WERE MORE ACCURATE BECAUSE OF THEIR SOURCES. STILL, AS A HEAD OF STATE HE REALIZES THAT ANOTHER HEAD MAY WELL HAVE TO REQUEST CHANGES IN
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APPOINTMENTS. HE WISHES VERY MUCH THAT HE COULD HAVE ARRANGED TO MEET

PRESIDENT NIXON ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4. "HOWEVER, MY AFRICAN BROTHERS WOULD NEVER HAVE UNDERSTOOD IF I AS OAU CHAIRMAN HAD MET THE PRESIDENT BEFORE ADDRESSING THE UNGA." INCIDENTALLY, HE WENT ON, THE VOA HAS CARRIED EXTENSIVE REPORTS ON PRESIDENTS HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY AND MOBUTU'S CALLS ON THE PRESIDENT. DID I KNOW HOW THEIR MEETINGS WERE ARRANGED?

3. I EXPLAINED THAT THE IVORIAN LEADER WAS ON A STATE VISIT WHICH HAD BEEN ARRANGED WEEKS IF NOT MONTHS IN ADVANCE BECAUSE SUCH VISITS CALL FOR MUCH PREPARATION. IN THE CASE OF MOBUTU, HE SIMPLY WAS PREPARED TO STAY LONGER THAN GOWON, HAD THEREFORE A MORE FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE, AND THE CALL WAS MADE ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, AFTER THE GENERAL HAD RETURNED TO LAGOS. YES, HE UNDERSTOOD THE LONG-ARRANGED HOUPHOUET VISIT BUT WAS NOT SO CERTAIN OF MY EXPLANATION ABOUT MOBUTU. "MOBUTU AND I ARRIVED IN NEW YORK ON THE SAME DAY, HE BY SHIP AND I BY AIR, AND LAST MONDAY HE TOLD ME THAT HE WAS GOING TO WASHINGTON THAT DAY TO SEE THE PRESIDENT." I REPLIED THAT PERHAPS MOBUTU DID GO TO WASHINGTON LAST MONDAY, OCTOBER 8; I REALLY DID NOT KNOW WHEN HE WENT; BUT THE FACT IS THAT HE DID NOT CALL ON THE PRESIDENT UNTIL OCTOBER 10, AFTER GOWON HAD RETURNED TO LAGOS. HE DROPPED THE POINT BUT INGENUOUSLY GAVE EVERY INDICATION THAT HE WAS STUNG BY MOBUTU, OF ALL PEOPLE, HAVING SUCCEEDED WHERE THE OAU CHAIRMAN HAD FAILED.

4. WE CLOSED THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION BY MY OBSERVING THAT I HOPED HE WOULD BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES TO CONTINUE THE PROFITABLE MEETINGS HE SAID HE HAD HAD IN NEW YORK. PERHAPS THE NEXT TIME HE COULD STAY TEN DAYS OR SO AND VISIT VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. WITH AN UNFATHOMABLE GLEAM AND SMILE, HE MERELY REPLIED "YES" AND SUGGESTED THAT WE MOVE ON TO TALK ABOUT A MORE IMPORTANT SUBJECT, THE MIDDLE EAST.

5. COMMENT: THIS EXCHANGE AND THE WHOLE EPISODE AS FUELED BY IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISTS ARE ILLUSTRATIVE OF SEVERAL POINTS IN NIGERIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS: (1) GOWON'S ARTLESS AND UNCHECKED COMMENTS ABOUT MOBUTU, AS WELL AS HIS BEGINNING AND THEN REFRAINING FROM FURTHER COMMENTS ABOUT HOUPHOUET THE DIALOGIST, AS HE REGARDS HIM, DOCUMENT THE MAIN REASON THAT THOSE AROUND THE

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GENERAL STRIVE SO HARD TO SAVE HIM FROM HIMSELF BY NOT GIVING RESIDENT FOREIGNERS MUCH ACCESS TO DODAN BARRACKS. WE MAY LEARN TOO MUCH FROM A MAN WHO SPEAKS OUT OF SIMPLE CONVICTION AND WHO SACRIFICES SOPHISTICATION AS HE PURSUES RIGHT-WRONG FORMULAS. (2) BY INDIRECTION GOWON GOT OFF HIS CHEST ABOUT ALL THAT BOTHERS HIM (HOUPHOUET AND ESPECIALLY MOBUTU); HE IS NOW REASONABLY SATISFIED. BUT HAWKS IN AND OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT, HAVING STIMULATED STORIES IN NEW YORK AND AT HOME, WILL BEGIN TO

REFINE THEIR THEORIES OF US INDIFFERENCE AND CALLOUSNESS. (3) FOR A WHILE AT LEAST FUTURE OFFICIAL AMERICAN VISITORS MAY ENCOUNTER SCHEDULING PROBLEMS AT DODAN BARRACKS AND BE ASKED TO SEE THEIR OPPOSITE NUMBERS IN STRICT ADHERENCE TO FMG PROTOCOL, WHICH CONTINUES TO BE RIGID AND FORMIDABLE. (4) ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES (THE ME, PETROLEUM, INVESTMENT, UN VOTES) WE WILL FARE NO BETTER AND NO WORSE THAN OTHER NATIONS AS THE FMG "PROTECTS" ITS SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE AGAINST "THOSE WHO TAKS US FOR GRANTED," BUT OFFICIALS WILL SEE IN THE ABORTED MEETING ONE MORE EXAMPLE THAT BUTTRESSES THE CORRECTNESS OF THEIR HARD LINE.

6. IN SUMMARY, WHILE GOWON APPEARS RELAXED AND ESSENTIAL INTERESTS REMAIN INTACT, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT OUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN HURT; THE AIR IS POISONED BY ACCOUNTS OF ALL OUR ALLEGED SINS (LAGOS 8303 FOR BEST EXAMPLE); COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS CAN BECOME AT LEAST TEMPORARILY CLOGGED; AND THE EXTREME NATIONALISTS, USING A TRUMPET OF XENOPHOBIA, WILL PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY BLARE "I TOLD YOU SO."
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